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## Using theatre techniques in foreign language education: A study on Molière's plays

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### Abstract

In today's world which gradually has become a big village, it is almost obligatory to learn at least one foreign language. These developments which happened in such a short period of time have affected, changed and transformed the student type. We are faced with a student type who watches and observes more than its predecessors. Therefore in education in general and in the foreign language education in particular, we have to incline to new quests and have to prepare course schedules which allow students to participate and to be active. Within the scope of this study, the reasons of the quests of new methods will be given. Moreover, making use of theatre in education and instruction will be explained by following the example of Molière's plays.

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*Key words:* foreign language education; theatre; Molière's plays

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### 1. Introduction

The importance of learning a foreign language is becoming every day more important on our planet which gradually has become a big village. The developments in media technology and the advances in transportation, travelling of more people by reason of new working areas and the necessity and obligation to learn a foreign language caused people in these fields to be in new quests of. On the other hand, because of some inconveniences in our education system, the foreign language education is face to face

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with serious problems. Although there are foreign language courses in the curriculum starting from the second level of primary education to the university level, it is significant that the students have some difficulties in using the foreign language even as they learned. As a result of the physical conditions, the courses are mainly focused on writing; without using the foreign language verbally, only by using some information learned by heart, the students are examined in written and evaluated thus, and perhaps these are the essence of the problem.

In this study, making use of theatre in foreign language education will be discussed on grounds of. Besides, the process of rewriting and staging of Molière's *Tartuffe* and *The Bourgeois Gentleman* by the students of the Division of French Language Education of the Faculty of Education will be mentioned.

In the resources, the definition of education is given as "the process of producing the desired behaviour change in the individual through his life and through intentional domestication" (Demirel: 5). In other words, generally speaking, the education is believed as an alteration process in behaviour. Within this process people adopt new behaviours by communicating and socializing with others as a social being. Instruction, on the other hand, is the process of making the targeted behaviour change through education in a planned and scheduled way in schools (Demirel: 8). Another definition of instruction is "the professional skill shown by the instructor" (Ceyhan: 3).

The life which is mentioned in the definition of education is the impression created during the communication of an individual with the other one and is considered in two categories: The acquired life and the experienced life. The acquired life includes all the activities as a result of the individuals' interaction with each other, whereas the experienced life includes only the activities which have influences on the individual and make changes in his behaviour (Demirel: 6, quoting Ertürk: 1972).

These explanations show us that the individual's communication with others during his learning process and his being in interaction are important factors in education and instruction.

Education and instruction are processes which work mutually both for the instructor and the student, in which both parties are improved by each other and in which they are both the instructor and the student for each other. Assuming the supremacy of one party and thinking that the other party is an empty container is totally wrong, because the student associates the knowledge he was given with the knowledge he has, he classifies it and uses. If he does not do so, then the knowledge he was given converts to a collection of knowledge gained through memorizing which would be forgotten after a while (Freire: 50)

In the recent years there are some views such as "active learning" or "student-centred education" which give responsibilities to the students during the learning process and assume them as an active element of the learning process, and these views form their theoretical basis on constructivist understanding. Constructivism is a theory of knowing which gradually becomes popular. When the literature of active learning is scanned, it is the interaction which is the indispensable condition of the active learning practices (for example, Açıkgöz: 50, quoting Glasefeld: 1995, Johnson and Smith: 1991, Stern, Huber: 1997). As a matter of fact, learning is a personal and internal process. However, without social interaction there can be no development. Learning life is realised within an environment. Thoughts in the environment and the expectations affect the process of learning. Social interaction increases the effectiveness of this process. On the basis of this thought there are theories of Piaget and Vygotsky. According to Piaget, there is no harmony without social interaction, it cannot be realised. Vygotsky's theory is based on social interaction. Another educationalist Bruner emphasises the importance of social

interaction in education process with the “reciprocity” theory. Reciprocity motivates people internally. According to Bruner, it is the principal of the human society to react to the other members of the species on the basis of reciprocity. When a joint action is required, when the reciprocity becomes necessary for a group to attain the goal, then there are some processes which lead the individual to learn and incline them to the necessary improvements. And this generates the driving force in learning. Again according to Bruner, it is necessary that the individual should participate in the group efforts, should take a role in the study and should reciprocally feel that he is useful in the group so the reciprocity can support the learning.

On the other hand, people only remember 10% of what they read, 20% of what they heard, 30% of what they saw, 50% of what they both saw and heard, 80% of both what they heard and told, and 90% of what they both saw and heard and touched and told. As the theatre contains each of the activities of seeing, hearing, touching and telling, it can fulfil the requirements of the group dynamics and the concepts of social interaction’s unity and reciprocity within the new reality it created in foreign language education. Therefore we can assume theatre to be an important means in foreign language education.

## **2. Using theatre in the foreign language learning process**

Fundamentally foreign language education has four dimensions: speaking, listening-understanding, writing, reading-understanding. If a student did acquire the competence in speaking, listening-understanding, writing, reading-understanding at the end of the academic year, then the education did not attain its goal. Besides many problems in education system of our country, the physical conditions of schools and crowded classes are the most important factors in foreign language education and instruction. Especially the speaking of the student, his usage of the new words he learned, repeating them loudly and making practice are hardly possible. During a course of 40 minutes, reading of a topic mostly remains limited. At this point, staging a theatre play where the foreign language taught is used can enable the student’s comfort to use the language, to pronounce it correctly and to learn some sentence models by reciting.

The most important point here is rewriting the play through improvisation and updating the dialogues instead of using available texts. Moreover, by experiencing the process of writing, the student would experience a process of learning in grammar and spelling. The text should be rewritten and have to be reckoned with. This kind of reckoning would provide to understand every detail of the play, to realise its literary value and to learn the language taught in details.

As a result of a research supporting the courses with the students of the French Department of Hasan ÂliYücel Teacher Training Faculty two plays of Molière, *Tartuffe* and *The Bourgeois Gentlement* were rewritten and staged in the academic year of 2009-2010. Steps for staging are as follows.

### *2.1. First Step*

#### **Preliminary Study:**

First of all, the text of the play was comparatively interpreted both in French and Turkish. The playwright’s uses of the language, the translation, the detailed story line, the plot, characters, the functions of characters, their peculiarities were discussed. For example, when and under which conditions *Tartuffe* had been written? What were the characteristics of that period? Who is Mr Orgon? Who is Cléante? What kind of a person is *Tartuffe*? Etc... How had the playwright expressed the peculiarities of the characters, with which words? On which axis is the dramatic conflict in the play? What is the message of the playwright? How had the story line been developed? Answers to all these

questions are discussed. Then the main theme of the play is determined and without ignoring the playwright's point of view, an outline is drawn.

For example, at the time when *Tartuffe* was written, many people had been aggrieved by the frauds and forgery of the members of the church and had had trouble. Molière had written this play to put this issue of fact on agenda. Thus the characters serving this issue of fact were determined.

Characters:

Orgon: A character, who believes Tartuffe, does what he says, thinks positively about him, and opposes all the family members because of him.

Cléante: Orgon's brother-in-law, he is aware of everything and he is a character who wants to show the real personality of Tartuffe to Orgon.

Elmire: Orgon's wife, a character who is aware of Tartuffe's real personality, wants to persuade her husband.

Dorine: The clever housemaid.

Madame Pernelle: Orgon's mother, a pious woman who believes Tartuffe.

Molière: The playwright; while he is writing the play, he also directs it.

The Plot:

1st scene: The play begins with Mme Pernelle's admonishing the household.

2nd scene: Orgon comes and ask Dorine about Tartuffe. Ignoring her talking about his wife Elmire's illness, he asks about Tartuffe by interrupting her all the time.

3rd scene: Cléante tries to explain to Orgon that Tartuffe is a fraud; however, he cannot convince him.

4th scene: Hereupon Molière interferences. He tells Cléante not to wear out himself and that he will show the realities to Orgon. By hiding Orgon in the living room, he tells him to watch what's happening.

5th scene: Elmire is on stage. Tartuffe comes and flirts with her. At first Orgon does not want to believe. He repeatedly jumps to the stage. Molière hardly holds him back, but in the end Orgon gets rid of. And comes at Tartuffe and captures him. At that time they freeze.

6th scene: Cléante comes, finishes his speech and the play ends.

## 2.2. Second Step

Improvisations:

The roles are distributed. Every scene is improvised. For example, everyone in the group successively admonishes the household as Mme Pernelle and expresses the thought what kind of a good person Tartuffe is.

For every scene the pictures are improvised through similar guidelines. After the play emerges roughly in outlines, the important tirades – such as the tirades of Orgon and Dorine or the one in which Cléante utters his thoughts on the pious ones, etc. – taken from the original text are put into the improvisations. After the improvisations are finalized, the play is recorded with a tape recorder completely.

## 2.3. Third Step

By correcting the dialogues recorded, the play is put into writing. The text is translated into French and to study on one's part begins. Insofar the play is enriched by the settings, costume, music, etc. And curtain!

### 3. Conclusion

Acting is a basic activity in understanding life. Whether the theatre is performed professionally or used as a means in education, the essence of acting depends on improvisation. Acting is making comments on people and on their relations and impersonation. This only can be realised by acting a very different character or by having his own reactions to a strange condition (Nutku: 165). The actor takes part in the production process through theatre. This process is a process supported by improvisations in which the text is rewritten and produced.

When we want to make use of theatre in foreign language education, the core of the studies is based on the improvisations. During this process of improvisation the students make the language of the play text their own and use it by updating. Within this process the student gets rid of their fear of using a foreign language by enjoying. He hears his own voice and how he pronounced. He hears others. He communicates. He reacts. Words accompany to the action. In other words, words reach to the senses and to the intellectual level at the same time, and, naturally, learning is realised twice as much and becomes permanent. As a result, using theatre in foreign language education can result in both the permanent and functional learning.

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